

# RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

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## CITY OF YORKTON DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT PLANNING CHARRETTE

### INTRODUCTION

The City of Yorkton is in the process of designing, adopting and implementing a Redevelopment Plan for the Downtown and West Broadway Corridor that responds to the specific planning issues faced in this area. The Redevelopment Plan focuses solely on issues of city revitalization, reinvestment and promotion strategies via a series of targeted initiatives. CMHC provided the funds for an integrated design charrette at which a cross-section of the City's community and a host of professionals gathered in the spirit of mutual education to generate sustainable plans for the future of the Downtown and West Broadway Corridor. The *Yorkton Downtown Redevelopment Planning Charrette* evaluated redevelopment opportunities and challenges faced by the City of Yorkton, and set the foundation for future, tangible plans that represent the unique interests and needs of the community.

The Charrette focused on generating buildable plans and sustainable design solutions for an area in blight. This area is a twelve hectare (thirty acre) brownfield site located in the heart of the City. It was identified as an area of public concern via focus groups and survey questionnaires distributed in November 2003. This precinct has remained an underutilized parcel of land for several decades, and the growing need to capitalize on it is now stronger than ever due to the City's renewed interest in encouraging meaningful development. The successful revitalization of the area is an essential component to strengthening the downtown core and ultimately the City of Yorkton. The intent is to design and create an area that can act as a pulse for the City.

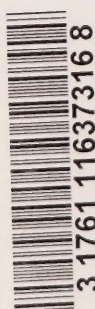


*The Northwest corner of the Study Area precinct.  
Photo Credit: Hilderman Thomas Frank Cram*

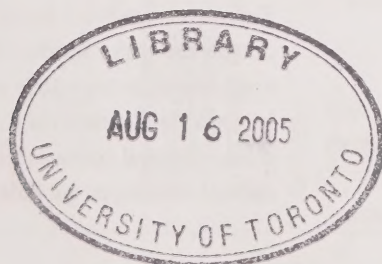
### BACKGROUND

The planning process for the area began several years ago with nearly a year of research and public consultation prior to the Charrette, which represented a culmination of redevelopment research, dialogue and exchange of expertise. The Charrette was a multi-disciplinary, intensive working session that provided the community with the opportunity to reflect, review and comment on previous research and expand on their ideas for redevelopment.

The guidelines and plans generated during the Charrette provided sustainable goals, time frames, and design priorities for the redevelopment objectives, including: park development, transportation planning, urban design, environmental design, social health, affordable housing provision and economic viability. A main concern was ensuring that design solutions and redevelopment objectives were context-sensitive and responded to the unique make up of Yorkton's current



Canada





and future demographics. The Charrette designs addressed sustainability and proposed land-use scenarios for the area which were considered appropriate for the current and future community populations in terms of amenities, scale, density, location and layout.

## CHARRETTE OBJECTIVES AND PLANNING PROCESS

Planning for the Charrette began in the summer of 2004. Prior to that, the 2003 public surveys and focus groups gathered evidence and information towards a representative policy statement. The studies highlighted the community's desire to incorporate certain objectives into policy, including heritage preservation, urban design, architectural standards, socioeconomic development, transportation, parking, site analysis and housing options.

The first stage of the Charrette involved community outreach, whereby stakeholders, community leaders, advocates, allies and opposition were contacted in an effort to establish a platform for Charrette design. The information gathered shaped the Charrette into an event that would be both informative and educational for participants, and focus on a level of sustainability tailored to the capacity of the largely lay participant.

As part of the initial stage of the redevelopment policy design and Charrette planning, the municipality employed Hilderman Thomas Frank Cram (HTFC), a Winnipeg-based consulting firm. In close cooperation with CMHC and HTFC, the City of Yorkton digested the key redevelopment objectives obtained by the previous public consultation, and structured the Charrette around expanding on these issues. By elaborating on built form, infrastructure, the natural environment, and the population's needs, the Charrette generated several buildable development options.

## THE CHARRETTE EVENT

The event engaged more than eighty participants over a three-day period. Various professionals presented material about appropriate land-use scenarios, sustainable community planning practices, alternative energy systems for new developments, funding strategies for energy-efficient developments, sustainable housing options, achieving "cool space" in Yorkton and architectural design techniques. The Charrette participants manipulated and incorporated this information into feasible and viable design plans.

The collaborative design effort brought together teams comprised of local citizenry, business owners and officials, urban designers, architects, landscape architects, engineers and senior researchers from across Canada. The stakeholders represented different interests and expertise, and were assigned to predetermined working groups to ensure an eclectic mix of participants. The eight groups of eight to ten participants had access to various resources and a team facilitator. The integrated design process fostered a dynamic working environment, thus group makeup was not static.

An open dialogue allowed a free-flow of information and expertise between groups, and ultimately contributed to more robust redevelopment plans. The outcome demonstrated that committed individuals from different backgrounds can come together to generate tangible redevelopment plans that uphold sustainable practices and that competing interests do not stifle creativity but challenge it.

Charrette planning and design activities are largely unrestrained creative endeavours. However, all development options were to uphold proposed objectives, community interests and emphasize integration between social, environmental and economic development strategies. The Charrette teams looked specifically at:

- Creating park space for passive recreation and special events. The park should serve as a catalyst for commercial growth, increased pedestrian activity, and communicate a "theme" for Yorkton.
- Improving vehicular and pedestrian traffic over the railway tracks that transverse the area, and incorporating an at-grade, tunnel or overpass crossing into the area.
- Exploring the circulation possibility of closing and/or extending arterial streets that flow into the area.
- Creating an aesthetically pleasing streetscape design that would create a supportive atmosphere for the pedestrian experience.
- Considering new construction guidelines that would support the historic character and overall "theme" for the downtown and subsequently the study area.
- Identifying housing options aimed at generating an appropriate blend of housing affordability, type, density, design and layout.

## GENERAL FINDINGS

The three-day design Charrette brought together a variety of participants and challenged them to generate future plans for the area. During this process plan themes and commonalities emerged. A large emphasis was placed on the City's strengths, and plans highlighted Yorkton's rich culture and heritage, expanses of parklands and waterways, successful local sports teams and popular festivals and fairs. The groups reconvened several times over the course of the Charrette to discuss their findings and plans, and two themes emerged as central to the redevelopment initiative: (1) Transportation and Mobility Strategies, and (2) Quality of Life.

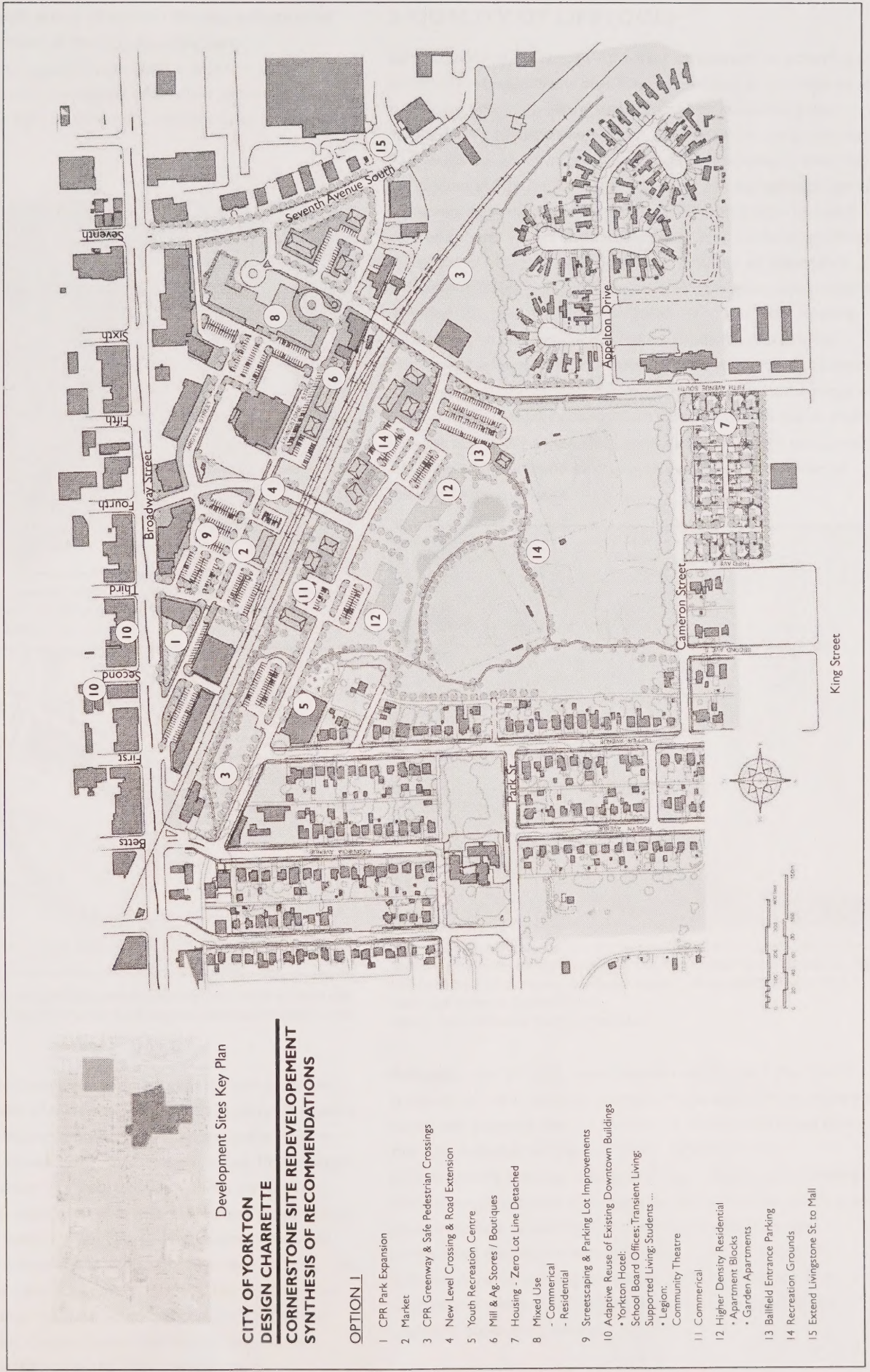
### I. TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Teams discussed and devised strategies to plan for transportation despite the major hurdle of the railway tracks, which have been an impediment to large-scale growth. Time was spent defining vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns in relation to the tracks. General consensus was reached to install a grade level railway crossing in the near future at a junction at Fourth Avenue



# CORNERSTONE SITE

The Downtown Redevelopment Plan will be used to generate buildable plans for the above-mentioned 30-acre brownfield site located in the City Of Yorkton. The following concept plan illustrates all the synthesized ideas of one option that was discussed at the Design Charrette.







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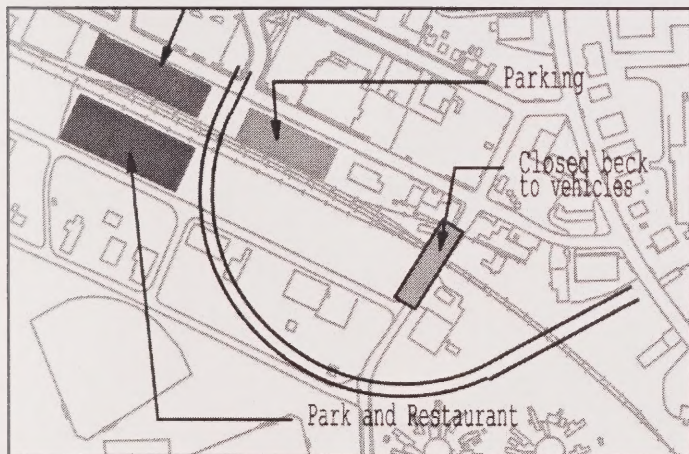
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South. Creating feasible access points into the area will promote traffic flow into the heart of the City. As a long-term transportation goal, groups also expressed a desire to install a grade-separated crossing that would safely allow vehicles and pedestrians to cross over or under the railway tracks at several key locations.



A charrette participant presents her group's vision for installing a future, above-grade railway crossing that supports the widely accepted "historic railway" theme.  
Photo Credit: Hilderman Thomas Frank Cram

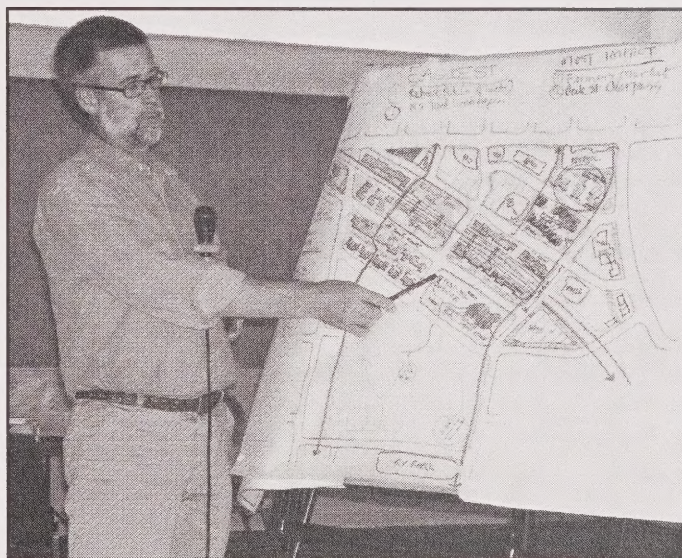


Design plans illustrate one transportation proposal whereby Beck Street is closed and a significant parkway provides direct access to an east-end commercial district via the redevelopment area.

The design plans also promoted area "walkability" and proposed a sophisticated network of pedestrian linkages throughout. Proposed housing developments and amenities were connected to nature pathways and parks via walkways, trails and greenways. Most linkages were planted with trees or shrubs consistent with xeriscaping practices that would support water conservation, easy maintenance, natural habitat and social spaces. This pedestrian-oriented focus encourages energy conservation and a collective responsibility that supports environmentally-sound travel options. The endorsement of alternative modes of transportation and proposed greenways that act as recreation, transportation and habitat opportunities suggests future potential for green policy development.

## 2. QUALITY OF LIFE (QOL)

Better quality of life was an important component to achieving a successful redevelopment plan. This was defined by participants as supporting arts and culture, local agriculture initiatives, green infrastructure design, seniors, youth and various housing options. The teams closely integrated all of their QOL elements into the redevelopment design plans and saw them serving practical, social and environmental objectives. More specifically, groups included centralized arts venues and incubation settings for local agri-foods (such as a Farmer's Market) into the area to act as downtown anchors. Additionally, groups incorporated park space, environmental buffering, storm-water retention ponds, central seniors housing, high-density mixed-use developments, youth-focused activity centers and a large variety of housing options which would appeal to a variety of populations. Proposed housing reflected a range of types such as seniors housing, town homes, condominiums, student housing, secondary suites, small units and single room occupancies. They were largely found in the south end of the area close to existing neighbourhoods.



Design plan illustrates the location of major circulation arteries green infrastructure including park space and well-landscaped areas, and family housing (bottom of map). The location of family housing is directly related to the availability of adjacent park space and access to festival venues.  
Photo Credit: Hilderman Thomas Frank Cram

Amenities vital to QOL were concentrated around the railway tracks at the mid- to north- section of the area. Groups wished to retain and integrate new amenities into the existing urban fabric of the City. Adjacent to the main street in Yorkton, the redevelopment precinct is an area of high visibility, thus creating a smooth transition from city center to the study area, which would have immediate economic and social ripple effects to the surrounding downtown businesses and neighbourhoods. The adaptive reuse of existing downtown building stock is a City opportunity which could help to accommodate some of the identified community needs.





Design plans illustrate the participants' desire to situate a Farmer's Market, a railway museum and a youth center in a central location in the redevelopment area. These QOL-focused amenities cater to Yorkton's strong agricultural, arts and heritage, and recreational background.

## CONCLUSION

The City of Yorkton Redevelopment Charrette proved to be a powerful tool for bringing together a cross-section of the community with differing interests, expertise and backgrounds. It generated a tangible vision for the future of the area. Groups dealt with complex design and building issues over a short period of time and were able to reach redevelopment goals with the use of relatively few measures. The Charrette now acts as a catalyst for on-going community support and the will to see their hard work and visions materialize.

Consistent attendance, creative design options and community energy contributed to the success of the Charrette. Most participants felt optimistic about the design possibilities of the downtown core. The Charrette designs will help to guide future change in a manner that supports the needs of current generations while at the same time, does not impede the growth and productivity of future generations. The many community members were able to make a vital contribution to the future of their city in a supportive, educational atmosphere.

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## Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the *National Housing Act*, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

This fact sheet is one of a series intended to inform you of the nature and scope of CMHC's research.

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